

## Can Do Versus Must Do

CPT TRAVIS L. MCINTOSH

E COMPANY, 1ST BATTALION, 212TH AVIATION REGIMENT  
FORT RUCKER, ALA.

We push to have a “can-do” attitude. Most would agree that when you believe you can accomplish whatever you try, you’re much more likely to reach your goals if you have a positive attitude. A positive outlook can energize you. A can-do spirit can supply you with the momentum you need to get through the most challenging and unforeseen circumstances. Your chain of command wants you to have a can-do attitude. However, there is a mature balance between can-do and must-do that we, as leaders, must learn to control.

In our profession, one of the most challenging—and most destructive—habits is the tendency to allow this can-do attitude to persist into a must-do action. As we continue to manage risk across the full spectrum of our mission, the instructor pilots in E Company, 1-212th Aviation Regiment (UH-60 Flight School XXI), share a common slogan, “Is this a Can Do or Must Do action that I’m about to take?” It is our nature to have a can-do attitude in the military, especially as aviators. However, too much of this approach turns our actions into must-do insistent events, which may result in a driven catastrophic failure. Consider the following definitions:

- Can Do – An action, in which I’m trained, qualified, equipped and prepared to execute. It will be challenging and most likely require the utmost skill on my part. This action will strongly support the mission and serve to equally benefit the unit, the team and the individuals involved. It requires motivation, preparation and hard work to fit in the can-do category. My command and the policies in place will undoubtedly support the action and any decisions included in its execution.
- Must Do – An action when closely looked at upon its completion would be considered unnecessary and driven. I’m allowing a goal, policy or an individual/co-pilot/air traffic controller to influence this action outside the scope of its intended purpose. This action no longer applies to the emplaced control measures; I’m not resourced, I’m rushed and I’m cutting corners to gain success or an advantage; or I feel it necessary and driven from an external influence. I’m forcing an irreversible outcome.

An accident is often categorized as either a random or driven failure of the individual or his equipment. There certainly is parallel meaning to “random vs. driven” and “can do vs. must do.” Have you ever rushed a preflight or walk-around inspection? Have you ever increased your airspeed significantly to not miss downtime or launched without checking Notices to Airmen or the MITA/hazards map? Did you skip table talk or not close out the flight records today? These are all examples of when you were the leading witness into a driven failure. Due to something you felt we “must do,” a shortcut was made or an action was taken outside the scope of its intended purpose and no longer applied to the emplaced control measures.

The next time you consider placing the aircraft in an unsafe flight profile or even drive your car excessively fast or over a long distance without adequate rest ... know that you’re only moments away from a driven and catastrophic failure. Can Do or Must Do ... that is the question.

